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SUBJECT: RWANDA ON NEW DRC PLANS: REALISTIC BUT WILLING

Classified By: Ambassador Michael R. Arietti,
reason 1.4 (B/D)

Summary

¶1. (C) Special Advisor for Conflict Resolution Timothy Shortley and Ambassador met separately with Great Lakes Advisor Ambassador Richard Sezibera and Foreign Minister Charles Murigande on November 5. Sezibera and Murigande both expressed disappointment with past attempts to fashion multilateral approaches to negative forces in the eastern Congo, but were supportive of the USG's enhanced engagement. They pledged participation in a special Tripartite-Plus meeting in Addis with the Secretary in December, and expressed support for simultaneous steps to de-escalate the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) tense standoff with renegade general Nkunda, and to disarm and dissolve the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). They believe ending the FDLR problem will require a mixture of military and political actions, including further action by the UNSC. End summary.

Ambassador Sezibera

¶2. (C) In his meeting with Great Lakes Advisor Ambassador Richard Sezibera, Shortley expressed the USG's wish to work directly with the DRC and Rwandan governments, in conjunction with the UN and with other interested governments, in fashioning a realistic plan to deal with renegade general Nkunda and with the FDLR. Shortley communicated the DRC's change of policy on this subject, saying that in recent meetings in Kinshasa, President Kabila and members of his staff now accepted the need for a political and diplomatic resolution to the standoff with Nkunda. Further, the DRC now accepted that action against Nkunda and the FDLR should be simultaneous, not sequential. Shortley asked for Rwandan assistance in achieving the first "small step" of encouraging Nkunda's troops to appear for brassage, to de-escalate the tense security situation in North Kivu, and provide political space for the U.S. initiative.

¶3. (C) Sezibera began by expressing considerable disappointment with past plans and past meetings to deal with negative forces in eastern DRC. In 2002, he said, the GOR withdrew its troops from eastern Congo with the explicit understanding that the FDLR would be dealt with. The U.S. had been very helpful in finding "a way for us to leave." However, in the ensuing five years, he said, there had been many meetings, and many plans for action, but little actual progress made in disarming and disbanding the FDLR. General Nkunda was only the latest in a series of "diversions" from the main task of confronting the most formidable negative force in the eastern Congo. What the GOR would like to see now was: 1) a new UN Security Council resolution aimed squarely at the FDLR; 2) MONUC given an explicit mandate to confront the FDLR; 3) immediate action by DRC troops against

the FDLR; 4) denial of access to the media by FDLR spokesmen; 5) a "de-emphasis" on Nkunda, whose raison d'etre would dissolve when the FDLR was gone. Regarding Shortley's request for assistance in getting Nkunda's troops to brassage, the GOR was hesitant to contact Nkunda absent permission from the DRC government, given continuing allegations of GOR support for him, he added.

14. (C) Shortley agreed on the need for concrete action against the FDLR, but cautioned the DRC government faced significant political risks in the Kivus, and needed to show progress with Nkunda to shore up its support with the Congolese public in the Kivus and elsewhere. Simultaneous action was the best approach, answering the needs of both governments, and dealing with two concurrent threats to Congolese sovereignty. As signs of enhanced USG involvement, the USG had assigned an officer to Goma, and would attend meetings of the Joint Verification Mechanism as an observer. These steps would increase USG visibility, and would support joint cooperation between the two governments. The USG planned to convene a special Tripartite-Plus meeting in Addis Ababa in December, to be presided over by the Secretary. In preparation for this meeting, Shortley advised he planned to attend the upcoming meetings in Nairobi of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, where bilateral discussions will attempt to close differences between the GOR and the GDRC on the Congolese FDLR plan of action. Possible actions items under such a plan, to be considered in conjunction with the UN and other interested governments, could include more robust efforts to disarm negative forces, training of elite DRC units to confront FDLR command centers, an engagement process with the FDLR by Congolese authorities, transferring the Fusion Cell to Goma (with third country participation to assist the Cell), and additional international observers.

15. (C) Shortley then pressed Sezibera on charges leveled by the DRC government -- that the GOR supports Nkunda materially, and that Rwandan troops often cross the DRC border to assist Nkunda (with the DRC government claiming to have six hours of audio tapes of communication between Nkunda and Rwandan forces). Sezibera vigorously denied any such assistance to Nkunda, and said the GOR was anxious for a quick start-up of the Joint Verification Mechanism. He noted that his government had been waiting impatiently for the DRC to tender its list of nominated officers for the process. Shortley replied that the DRC had now given its list of five nominees. He and Sezibera agreed to seek dates and locations for JVM meetings as soon as possible.

Foreign Minister Murigande

16. (C) In his meeting with Foreign Minister Murigande, Shortley reiterated the USG's enhanced activity in seeking security solutions in the eastern DRC, and the Kabila government's agreement to simultaneous actions regarding Nkunda and the FDLR. Noting Rwandan disappointment with past plans and past meetings, with little concrete action, Shortley said that this time "the USG will be present on the ground as well as facilitate." Working with the DRC and Rwanda, and other interested governments, a solid plan of action could be reached. The way forward was not an easy one, said Shortley, but "an opening" now existed for concerted action in the Kivus. One small way in which Rwanda could help would be to encourage Nkunda to send troops to brassage, and so de-escalate tensions in North Kivu. "We are looking to change the security dynamic," said Shortley, "and we need your help." Acting on the instructions of A/S Frazer, Shortley also formally asked the Minister for Rwandan attendance at the Tripartite-Plus Summit in Addis Ababa in December.

17. (C) Murigande welcomed Shortley's visit to Rwanda, and said that Rwanda was ready to work with the USG. Rwanda was ready to cooperate with new efforts to address the FDLR and other negative forces in eastern DRC, despite past failures to move beyond "meetings and plans" to concrete achievements

on the ground. An "unstable equilibrium" exists in the Kivus, he said, and Rwanda fears greater turmoil if the present security impasse continued. Further, Rwanda worried that if some "miraculous solution" for the "Nkunda problem" was found, the international community would once again "forget" the FDLR. However, Murigande said, Rwanda would be happy to see the Nkunda situation "resolved" if that meant the FDLR would finally be dealt with. MONUC had solid intelligence on the location of FDLR command centers, he noted, and this should be acted upon. Other steps that could be taken, he said, included listing the FDLR as a terrorist organization (Note: currently the Department lists the FDLR as a Group of Concern), an expansion of the MONUC mandate, directing it to confront the FDLR, a Security Council condemnation of the FDLR, actions to restrict access to international media by FDLR spokesmen in Europe and elsewhere, and unequivocal and repeated statements by Kabila condemning FDLR presence in the Kivus. The DRC needed to be unequivocal in its actions, he emphasized.

18. (C) Murigande then reviewed a January 2005 attempt by the AU's Peace and Security Council to bring other nations' forces into the eastern Congo to confront the FDLR. Angola, South Africa, and Ethiopia were consulted, and were ready to provide forces but the DRC would not allow it, he said. Rwanda offered to provide its own forces under Congolese command, an offer also refused, he noted. Currently, he commented, the Angolans would welcome an opportunity to assist if requested.

19. (C) As with Ambassador Sezibera, Shortley cautioned Murigande that the Kabila government faced great political risks in the Kivus. Having spent much political capital engineering, with MONUC's help, a significant military build-up, Kabila needed to show success to the Congolese public -- he had to have progress in dealing with Nkunda. In that context, President Kabila's decision to accept USG, UN and other help in the Kivus, and opt for diplomatic and political solutions, was a major step forward. We had not hesitated to tell DRC officials that cooperation between the FARDC and the FDLR appeared to be occurring, said Shortley, nor note for them the dangers for regional security and for relations with the U.S.

110. (C) Murigande responded that his government would attend the December Tripartite-Plus meeting in Addis Ababa, and would work with the DRC, the USG and other governments on the security situation in the Kivus. He said he hoped that the DRC government appreciated that "we are on our best behavior." He said, the international community could station observers all along Rwanda's border with the DRC, to verify that "we are not helping Nkunda." Rwanda wanted proposals agreed-upon jointly with interested governments, leading to concrete actions against negative forces in the Kivus. In closing, Murigande asked Shortley what the result would be if the FDLR took advantage of the confused situation in the Kivus to launch a major attack on Rwanda? "We would not sit by and simply count our dead," said the Foreign Minister. "We would be drawn in."

111. (C) Comment. The Rwandan government may not entirely appreciate President Kabila's difficult position in the Kivus. The Rwandans principal concern, as it has been for some time, is the presence of the FDLR. Secondly, they worry over rising ethnic tensions in North and South Kivu, and the potential for widespread violence against Rwandophone populations should the security situation worsen. Despite their disappointments with past plans for eastern DRC, they are willing to work with us and other partners in the search for comprehensive approaches to negative forces in the DRC.
End Comment